

U.S. Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation



July 2011

# **FBI** **Law Enforcement** **Bulletin**



## **Police Negotiations with War Veterans**



July 2011  
Volume 80  
Number 7

United States  
Department of Justice  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
Washington, DC 20535-0001

Robert S. Mueller III  
Director

Contributors' opinions and statements should not be considered an endorsement by the FBI for any policy, program, or service.

The attorney general has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the director of the Office of Management and Budget.

The *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (ISSN-0014-5688) is published monthly by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20535-0001. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to Editor, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, FBI Academy, Quantico, VA 22135.

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**Cover Photo**

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# FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin

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# ***Police Negotiations with War Veterans***

## ***Seeing Through the Residual Fog of War***

By DOUGLAS ETTER, LIANE B. MCCARTHY,  
and MICHAEL J. ASKEN, Ph.D.

*"Square one no longer exists for  
those who have gone to war."*

—Down Range: To Iraq and Back

Since the Global War on Terror began on September 11, 2001, more than 1.6 million Americans have deployed to distant lands to engage a determined enemy. When they return home, most make a smooth transition into civilian life, but others do not. All of them, however, face adjustment challenges.

The military offers the best support programs and resources, such as Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, the Center for Deployment Psychology at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, and the Battle-mind Program, ever available to this nation's warriors.<sup>2</sup> One deployed chaplain explained, "We don't want our people to

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just come home physically; we want them to come back close to the human beings they were when they left.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite these programs, some warriors still have difficulty with their readjustment or reintegration into the lives, families, schools, businesses, and communities they left behind. Often, these readjustment issues painfully play out in private. At other times, however, they involve municipal, county, and state police authorities when private affairs disintegrate and become matters of public concern and safety. No community—small town, suburb, or metropolitan area—is exempt from these issues.

Since 1995, the FBI’s Hostage and Barricaded Database

System (HOBAS) has been compiling statistics on crisis incidents submitted by law enforcement agencies across the United States. As of July 29, 2009, it contains a total of 5,477 incidents that represent a sample of the situations including suicidal individuals, domestic altercations, homicides followed by suicides, bank robberies, and barricaded individuals, faced by law enforcement. In 6 percent of these incidents, the individual involved was a veteran or active-duty member of the military. To aid the law enforcement community, the authors examine the characteristics of these events and offer some specific insights and suggestions about dealing with recent combat veterans whose distress

may lead to crisis situations and police interventions.

### Consequences of War

Wars produce multiple types of injuries to the soldiers who fight them. Mild traumatic brain injury (MTBI) has been characterized as the signature injury of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and psychological problems their Agent Orange.<sup>4</sup>

A psychologist from Walter Reed Army Medical Center who works with MTBI patients has said that 70 percent of injuries to troops in Iraq are caused by improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and 10 to 20 percent of troops experience MTBI.<sup>5</sup> The prevalence of major depression, generalized anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder



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(PTSD) for those returning from Iraq may be from 15.6 to 17.1 percent; the figure may be 11.2 percent for those returning from Afghanistan (pre-Iraq troop drawdown).<sup>6</sup> Additional screening and elapsed time since coming home are important factors in recognizing the continued presence of PTSD and mental health problems as a result of wartime experiences. A second screening conducted 3 to 6 months after active-duty military personnel returned showed an increase of reported mental health problems from 11.8 percent to 16.7 percent and for reserve personnel from 12.7 percent to 24.5 percent.<sup>7</sup>

By themselves (as well as in concert with MTBI), PTSD, depression, and other disorders produce a major impact on returning veterans' adjustment and potential for a police-related encounter. Concerns are exacerbated because it is likely that among the veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, only about one-half, and in some studies only 20 to 40 percent, seek treatment.<sup>8</sup> Stigma and concerns about the effect of a psychiatric diagnosis and treatment on their careers inhibit their desire to seek therapy.<sup>9</sup>

As an example of the interpersonal impact of reintegration issues that have the potential to bring veterans in contact with law enforcement, it should be recognized that those with

PTSD are two to three times more likely to commit intimate partner violence than veterans without the disorder.<sup>10</sup> Sources also suggest that PTSD is related to alcohol abuse.

One tragedy involved a military wife who attributed her veteran husband's psychological breakdown and subsequent shootout with sheriff's deputies to PTSD from multiple traumas in Iraq.<sup>11</sup> These included trying

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***The first step for officers tasked with potentially responding to incidents involving veterans is to become familiar with the traits and trends experienced in past cases.***

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to deal with the experiences of both an adolescent Iraqi girl walking up to his heavy equipment transport truck to blow herself up and the image of an old man with his donkey who was killed because he did not respond to commands, with her husband believing that he may have been deaf. Moreover, her husband felt guilty about being medically evacuated for

a breathing disorder and then learning that a fellow army reservist had been killed by a transportation mishap that he was convinced he could have prevented. Indeed, it was this event and this guilt that led to his acute breakdown and shooting episode. Of note, a deputy was wounded in that incident, which the county sheriff, himself a Vietnam veteran, described as the reservist having “a battle plan laid out,” which he executed.

In some months, depression and related suicide have caused more deaths than combat.<sup>12</sup> A 23-year-old national guardsman returned home from Iraq in 2005 and slipped into “a mental abyss so quietly” that neither his family nor unit noticed. He shot himself in the head with a .22-caliber rifle.<sup>13</sup> In another incident, the wife (and mother of three) of a Marine gunnery sergeant who took his life inside their home described the act as contradictory to the very person he was and confusing to understand.<sup>14</sup>

The rate of suicide on the home front is double that of war zones. PTSD, depression, problem drinking, relationship issues, disabling injuries, and financial and legal problems are factors that raise the risk of suicide, often by a factor of two. While rates of suicide are not an “epidemic,” the numbers are of ever-growing concern.<sup>15</sup>

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## Transition Issues

The first step for officers tasked with potentially responding to incidents involving veterans is to become familiar with the traits and trends experienced in past cases. In thinking about what to expect and anticipating potential responses, officers can optimize their mental preparation. No specific behaviors are predictable, but exposure to and familiarity with similar incidents can provide insight and a frame of reference.

Skill sets that military members learn so they can survive combat and accomplish their missions may not translate well into the civilian world. These encompass more than shooting straight or

learning how to throw a hand grenade. Constant vigilance, expected immediate responses to orders without question, erratic driving to avoid roadside bombs or ambushes, operational security (e.g., providing information only on an as-needed basis), and carrying weapons 24/7 represent just a few of the critical skills needed in combat. The nature of the war environment also plays a significant role.<sup>16</sup>

- Hypervigilant states with no “day off”
- Selfish mentality centered on survival
- Sense of unlimited power and ability to make demands
- Tendency to vilify enemy supporters and even certain populations

- Offensive and defensive driving
- Sleep deprivation and chronic fatigue

When service members return from a war zone, they may have difficulty surrendering their weapons, which have provided them security and identity during their deployment (just as they do for law enforcement officers). They may continue to drive erratically because of debris on the road, or they may overreact to statements or gestures that they may interpret as hostile or threatening.

Domestic issues may develop if they believe family members are not quick enough to follow instructions. They have spent months or years controlling or suppressing emotions—especially those of a more tender, caring nature even toward family—to help them deal with separation. This continuation of emotional distance has been characterized as “freezing the heart”<sup>17</sup> and as “stringing up the (perimeter) wire.”<sup>18</sup>

Not surprisingly, these characteristics, which may develop or harden during deployment, can create difficulties upon returning home. Homecoming is not a single event with flags, hugs, and momentary cheers. Rather, it is an ongoing and often lengthy process.<sup>19</sup> Apathy, uneasiness, and the desire to avoid questions and repetition



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of war stories can lead veterans to shun social activities (even those of enthusiastic participation predeployment) with the family. Nightmares and other aspects of hypervigilance can result in a preference for sleeping alone and apart from loved ones. Anger, irritability, and accustomed authority can fuel domestic relationship problems as a residual need for survival-related control can cause friction with spouses and children.

Because of modern transportation, a Marine could be in a gun battle on Thursday and back home in the United States on Saturday or Sunday. In other cases, access or attitudes (fear of the stigma of being seen as weak or crazy) may inhibit forthrightness and needed intervention.<sup>20</sup> Letting go of habits essential for survival is a slow and difficult process for some combat veterans, and the law enforcement officers dealing with them must be aware of this.

### Invisible Wounds

Law enforcement personnel should understand that not all wounds of war are visible. In addition to PTSD, many combat veterans experience feelings of alienation and isolation, guilt, fear, and shame, along with an undefined sense of anger. A collision of conflicting feelings, such as relief that they made

it home but guilt about friends who did not, may occur. A conflict may exist between wanting to be with family but also missing their brothers and sisters at arms. As surprising as it may be for some civilians, veterans may long to return to combat zones where life is remarkably simpler and where they believe they were making a difference

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in the world and contributing to a cause far greater than anything they knew before or after combat.

In their book *Band of Sisters: American Women at War in Iraq*, Holmstedt and Duckworth describe the ordeal of a female Marine Corps captain, aviator, and weapons system operator who flew in an FA-18 Hornet.<sup>21</sup> She punched in the coordinates to attack barracks where enemy troops were

sleeping. She could see missiles launch and Iraqis running for their lives, white figures against the green background. She remained committed to the mission, but, like so many generations before her, she would have to learn how to cope with the emotional scars of combat. The captain's distress showed in her dreams. The intellectual and emotional synchrony of the war zone began to dissolve. She experienced questions about her beliefs in human life and her actions in the war. Further, she had additional stress. Being female, she was sure her male counterparts would view these emotions and questions as a sign of weakness and “being female.” At a family wedding 2 months after returning home, she felt perplexed by the attention and congratulations and requests to recount her battlefield experiences, the very actions she was viewing with ambiguity. However, it was her uncle, a Vietnam veteran, who “saw a look in her eyes that he recognized” and went over to her and gently said, “I know, I know.”

Walter Reed Army Medical Center psychologist Dr. Louis French echoes this, “No one comes away from war unscathed.” One veteran put it this way, “No one crosses a river without getting wet, and no one goes to war without being changed.”<sup>22</sup>

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Anger may be a particularly frequent and underappreciated remnant of the war experience. Many veterans have spent a long time experiencing anger—at the enemy, at separation from home, at the frustrations of assignment, and toward the administration. In her book *Stoic Warriors*, Nancy Sherman wrote, “Anger is as much a part of war as weapons and armor.”<sup>23</sup> She quotes Seneca, among the ancient stoic philosophers, as saying anger

They are like Fourth of July firecrackers that will burst in an instant by the instigation of one little match. Others allow their anger to simmer, hidden somewhere deep in their soul, until finally a devastating eruption occurs.

Veterans may take attitudes and perceptions from the battlefield that may not form part of the formal definition of PTSD but can profoundly influence interactions with others, especially police. These

the best friend and best hope the combat veteran may have in a situation escalating out of control is the informed police officer or negotiator.

### **Dangerous Assumptions**

In general, making assumptions when involved in a crisis negotiation can carry intrinsic risks. First, an incorrect assumption can result in losing rapport and credibility with the person in crisis. Attempts to demonstrate understanding could be undermined. Bad assumptions can communicate a judgment or opinion. This could cause a negative, defensive reaction and reduce any influence gained over the person. One police and military trainer calls this a conceptual baseline.<sup>25</sup> Officers need to remain aware of what their conceptual baselines are so as not to become unduly, unconsciously, and undesirably diverted or biased by them.

For example, it would be easy to assume that veterans who were cooks or mechanics in the service never personally experienced armed conflict. While many often believe that only the infantry or other combat arms branches engage in direct warfare, nothing could be further from the truth. Cooks may be delivering food as part of a convoy that may be attacked directly or indirectly from IEDs, rocket-propelled grenades, or small-arms fire. Additionally,

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***In addition to PTSD, many combat veterans experience feelings of alienation and isolation, guilt, fear, and shame, along with an undefined sense of anger.***

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“whets the mind for the deeds of war.” And, despite more evidence of the role of anger in war, she notes Cicero’s concern about what occurs when that anger is brought home. She cautions that all too often, warriors “bring home a rage that has lost its targets.”

Many veterans of combat can experience a much shorter fuse with their anger.

may include cynicism and distrust of government and societal institutions, a tendency to react to stressful situations with survival tactics, a hypersensitivity to justice and injustice, and difficulty with authority figures.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, if an incident rises to the level of police involvement and if the responding officers understand the veteran’s perspective, they have a good chance of defusing it. Indeed,



because American forces do not abandon vehicles damaged during combat, recovery teams often must retrieve them. Many of these teams—composed of mechanics, not infantrymen—have been ambushed as they attempt to secure these disabled vehicles.

It also is wrong to assume that just because a veteran is a woman, she never personally engaged in combat. Even though the military currently restricts women from traditional combat roles, such as the infantry, women can serve as medics, and many have done so with honor and distinction as part of an infantry company. As such, women may be carrying a pack and standing shoulder to shoulder with her male counterparts in the infantry as part of the company's or battalion's combat medical operations.

The key lies in opening the lines of communication with soldiers in crisis and expressing a willingness to listen to their stories. Employing active-listening skills can help officers and negotiators effectively demonstrate an understanding of the experiences and emotional states of these veterans.

### Healthy Survivors

Not all veterans will be adversely affected by their war experiences. Research has shown that 85 to 90 percent of MTBI veterans completely recover



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and return to baseline within 1 year.<sup>26</sup> While not a reason to minimize concern, combat-related suicide rates do not exceed the prevalence of demographically matched groups.<sup>27</sup> Finally, many behavior patterns observed postdeployment are not pathological in themselves, but have been essential survival patterns practiced for a long time and, therefore, are not easy to abandon. Acknowledging this and avoiding as much as possible a label or even innuendo that such behavior patterns constitute unhealthy reactions will facilitate help for veterans struggling to process their war-time experiences.

Law enforcement officers always need to consider whether they are dealing with a significant mental illness that may or may not be war related. However, beyond that, in defusing situations with combat

veterans, police officers and negotiators should remember that war changes people in ways still not fully comprehended. Today's service members all are volunteers, and many want to maintain the military values of duty, honor, and country, along with commitments to their units and friends.

Soldiers must be strong and brave. As a result, one of their greatest fears is to be perceived as weak or cowardly. Warriors must not be put into situations where they will be forced to act in a way that proves their personal courage. They want to be treated with respect, and they have little tolerance for half-truths or disingenuous talk. By relating to them as equals and as servants of the greater good who may not always be understood or appreciated, police officers and negotiators have a better chance than almost

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anyone to earn a veteran's trust and to de-escalate situations that potentially may become dangerous.

### **Rapport-Building Challenges**

The responding law enforcement officers may or may not have military experience. However, they share many common bonds with military personnel. Every day, officers face dangerous situations and life-or-death decisions. Officers share the same desire to serve and feel that they are contributing and worthy. They have lost sisters and brothers on the force and faced their families with guilt and pain. Officers understand the concepts of honor, bravery, and duty. They also have witnessed humankind's capacity for evil and cruelty. At the end of each day, they go home and attempt to separate the job from their family life with varying degrees of success. In attempting to relate to veterans, however, officers must be careful not to equate their experiences to that of what veterans may have encountered. While some veterans will have the utmost respect for law enforcement officers, others may, justly or unjustly, view combat as unique and significantly different from police work.

This is not to say that officers would attempt to equate

their experiences with those of veterans. However, it may help officers to demonstrate empathy and recognize and reflect back some of the underlying emotions of the veterans in crisis. For example, "It sounds like you had to make a difficult decision in that situation, and now you are second-guessing yourself and feeling bad."

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***The key lies in opening the lines of communication with soldiers in crisis and expressing a willingness to listen to their stories.***

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In other words, a lack of similar experiences does not prohibit officers or negotiators from developing rapport. After all, their primary skill is to listen and attempt to demonstrate understanding. The conversation is not about them or their experiences, it is focused and driven by the person in crisis until this individual is able to return to more rational thinking. It is equally important not to avoid topics that the person may bring up. Avoidance of a topic prevents a true understanding of the problem and related

emotions causing the crisis. The individual is given the opportunity to vent emotions, thereby lowering the tension of the situation. Active-listening techniques, such as emotion labeling, mirroring, paraphrasing, and others, demonstrate an officer's effort to understand.<sup>28</sup> By listening and reflecting the emotions beyond the words, the officer seeks to de-escalate the situation and prevent the soldier from acting out while in a state of crisis.

Some specific closed and open-ended questions can help engage a distressed combat veteran. Coupled with the foundational approaches to negotiation (e.g., active-listening skills), these can help officers and negotiators build rapport and safely influence a potentially dangerous situation.

- How long were you in the military? Are you still in? (They may have a strong bond or commitment to members of their unit.)
- What was your military occupational specialty? (Some are more prone to experience direct combat than others, but none are completely free of its danger.)
- Were you ever deployed? How long? (The chance of potential problems rises in direct proportion to the length of deployment.)

- How many times were you deployed? (The more times they are deployed, the more likely they are to suffer residual effects.)
- Where were you deployed? (Certain areas are more dangerous than others.)
- What was it like for you? (The answer may offer insights into their mind-set; it also allows the officer or negotiator to demonstrate genuine listening skills.)
- Do you miss it? (This provides insight into the distressed subject's mind-set.)
- How long have you been back? What is it like to be back? (It takes time to re-adjust to the civilian world. Although it is not an absolute, the longer they have been back, the more likely they are to be reintegrating to some degree. The second open-ended question offers potential insight into their mind-set.)
- Are you in contact with fellow veterans? (This may elicit available support or reveal friends who died in the war.)

It is critical to remember that these questions simply are a guide to help officers clarify a possible topic brought up by veterans. They are not to be used to question individuals in crisis who, in fact, may not

want to talk about their war-time experiences.

The critical skill set of responding officers and negotiators includes their ability to apply active-listening skills and demonstrate an attempt to understand the emotions bubbling on or under the surface of the veteran in crisis. Those emotions are labeled and reflected back to the individual in an effort to diffuse them long



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enough to allow a more rational light to shine through or, in the worst-case scenario, to provide the tactical team enough time to react safely.

## Conclusion

Although responding law enforcement officers and negotiators want to help this nation's honored warriors, they must remember that a veteran or active-duty soldier also can represent an extreme danger. Their

weapons training and ability to act under pressure make it all the more imperative that law enforcement personnel prepare to de-escalate the situation and avoid "the battle."

Our veterans and soldiers have returned, and, just as in the war zone, there are no acceptable losses. They stood between Liberty and her enemies, and now it is the challenge and responsibility of our law enforcement officers and negotiators to stand between these valiant warriors and the fog that has not yet lifted for them. ♦

## Endnotes

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

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## Wanted: Notable Speeches

**T**he *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* seeks for its Notable Speech department transcripts of presentations made by criminal justice professionals. Anyone who has delivered a speech recently and would like to share the information with a wider audience may submit a transcript of the presentation to the *Bulletin* for consideration.

As with article submissions, the *Bulletin* staff will edit the speech for length and clarity, but, realizing that the information was presented orally, maintain as much of the original flavor as possible. Presenters should submit their transcripts typed and double-spaced on 8 ½- by 11-inch white paper with all pages numbered, along with an electronic version of the transcript saved on computer disk, or e-mail them. Send the material to: Editor, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, FBI Academy, Quantico, VA 22135, or to [leb@fbiacademy.edu](mailto:leb@fbiacademy.edu).

## Making Officers' Lives Better

*"Leadership is not a place you sit; it's a choice you make."*

John Maxwell

**L**ike many who love sports, football season is the only thing that keeps me sane during the long, cold winter. With the conclusion of the Super Bowl, the winter blues can set in. An escape to south Florida and the beginning of baseball's spring training season ensures my survival until the warmer weather arrives. My annual ritual allows me to enjoy quality time with friends, the ocean, palm trees, and some Florida sunshine. This year, my spring training comrades included a lieutenant from the New York Police Department (NYPD) and a close friend who serves as an assistant police chief of a south Florida police agency.

Sitting in the stands watching spring training baseball is the most relaxing activity I know. I am inspired by the young players aspiring to make the team, knowing their career often rests with a single performance at bat or play in the field. An ice cold drink, peanuts, and a hot dog make for a perfect day.

As someone might expect, many of our conversations revolve around police work and other law enforcement activities. As graduates of the FBI National Academy, we often discuss various law enforcement challenges and leadership issues. Both of my friends spoke passionately about the need to ensure

the welfare of their officers. The lieutenant spoke of hating to be away from the office because he wants to make sure someone "has his officers' backs." The assistant chief talked about improving equipment and ensuring he knows of events in his officers' lives: birthdays, a new baby, or running a marathon.

On this sunny afternoon, surrounded by cheering baseball fans, peanuts, and popcorn, I learned an important leadership lesson. These two police professionals represented "the essence of leadership," which reflects caring about their officers, supporting them, leading by example, and embodying servant leadership. They espoused their leadership role as one to make their officers' lives better. Making sure their officers have the resources to be safe and effective, truly caring about them, and protecting them in this challenging, complex, and noble profession called law enforcement is true leadership. The commitment by these two law enforcement executives to the people under their command will continue, whether in the office or at a spring baseball game. ♦

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*Special Agent Michael O. McAuliffe, an instructor in the Leadership Development Institute at the FBI Academy, prepared this Leadership Spotlight.*

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# Service

# Police Practice



## ***The Early Notification Program***

By Kent D. Crutcher



Officers respond to a report of a man creating a disturbance in a local supermarket while armed with a butcher knife. Department call takers struggle to gather as much information as possible as units respond. Upon arrival, officers locate the subject—still armed with the knife—standing in an aisle of the store and, apparently, talking to himself. Using their training, the officers order him to drop the knife and get on the ground. The officers' presence and immediate shouting startle the armed subject, who turns and runs toward them in an attempt to flee. Understandably, the officers interpret this action as threatening and discharge their firearms.

The responding officers did not know of the subject's autism. Individuals with this condition may not respond to verbal cues or direction, and loud noises or voices may startle them. Would

these officers have handled this call any differently if they had this information available?

### **The Problem**

At midyear 2005, more than one-half of all prison and jail inmates had a mental health problem, including 705,600 in state prisons, 70,200 in federal prisons, and 479,900 in local jails.<sup>1</sup> At some point, many of these individuals will reenter society without the necessary medical support and follow-up care. Further, many members of the general population suffer from mental conditions, some of them severe.

In addition to individuals with severe mental disorders, officers routinely come into contact with another growing portion of the population—those with disabilities. On average, during 2001 to 2005, almost 30 percent of the noninstitutionalized



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adult U.S. population (approximately 62 million people) had difficulty in basic actions as indicated by reporting at least some trouble with fundamental movement or sensory, cognitive, or emotional responses.<sup>2</sup>

This brings about serious challenges for law enforcement. How can local police agencies legally obtain and store this medical information? And, once collected, how is this data provided to responding officers in a timely manner?

### The Solution

The Normal, Illinois, Police Department (NPD) recognized this need and developed not only a process to collect the information but a means to provide it to responding officers, allowing them time to develop a strategy (e.g., use of nonlethal weapons, approach-and-contact techniques) before arriving on scene.<sup>3</sup> Most important, it also can explain the suspicious actions on the part of the subject they soon may observe.

Agency personnel explored a unique concept: What if the subjects, their parents, or legal custodians voluntarily provided relevant medical information to the police? This inspired the development of the Early Notification Program (ENP), a voluntary notification system designed to aid in the interaction between citizens with special needs and responding law enforcement personnel.

As with any new program, specific questions require answers prior to the formulation of an effective plan. What will the program accomplish? Does it fill a defined need? What resources will it require? Rather than answer these questions themselves, NPD personnel conducted a series of meetings that included all local stakeholders. This team consisted of mental health service providers,

hospitals, law enforcement personnel, attorneys, the Autism Society, the Alzheimer's Association, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and many others. The discussions that followed provided the framework, support, and direction the program needed for acceptance and success.

This process allowed many questions to be answered and also gave rise to others. How would personal medical information be protected? Would it fall under the Freedom of Information Act

(FOIA) and be subject to disclosure? How does someone remove their information from the database at some point in the future? Identifying and addressing these concerns early on inspired trust and cooperation between all members involved.

### The Process

After months of discussion, the ENP launched. A person registering must be receiving or have a history of treatment for a condition that qualifies

for the program. By registering with their police agency, McLean County, Illinois, residents allow their specific medical information to be entered into a countywide dispatch database. When personnel enter a call for service from a registered subject's address into the computer-aided dispatch system (CAD), the medical information appears and is relayed to responding units via in-car computers. If, for some reason, the responding vehicle does not have a computer available, the officer receives a predetermined code over the radio. The officer then may refer to a quick reference guide to determine what medical information is being provided.

It became apparent that this type of program would benefit not only those suffering from mental illnesses but also disabled residents and those with

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special needs. Through discussions, the group developed a list of conditions that qualify potential applicants for the program.

- Autism
- Alzheimer's disease
- Down syndrome
- Deafness/hardness of hearing
- Mental illnesses (e.g., mood, psychotic, impulse control, anxiety, and childhood disorders)
- Visual impairment
- Physical disability
- Developmental disability
- Other special needs

### Marketing

Creating a successful marketing plan requires the involvement of the team. This holds true for two very important reasons. First, a cross-functional team can identify and address potential issues; however, many only surface when the team is involved.

Second, employing the cross-functional team improves the odds that those involved ultimately will support the plan. Getting buy in is a critical step in the process; if people do not believe in the plan, it will not work. The best way to gain buy in is to involve individuals in creating the plan. They will not criticize what they helped create.<sup>4</sup>

A successful marketing campaign involves three key components: 1) defining the product or service; 2) identifying the target market; and 3) developing awareness. Keeping these concepts in mind, the ENP committee developed a comprehensive marketing strategy. Brochures provided a quick overview of the program, who should register

and how, and frequently asked questions. Personnel distributed the brochures to approximately 50 locations throughout the community, including all law enforcement agencies, hospitals, social service agencies, and special interest groups and organizations.

In an attempt to inform all local residents about ENP, personnel contacted all media outlets and invited representatives to a press conference prior to the program's launch. Each agency serving on the committee received acknowledgment during the press conference. This not only signified the collaboration of resources but emphasized the support that each organization put forth in the program's development.

Upon request, NPD also attends annual events held by various community organizations to register their membership in the program. To date, these organizations have included NAMI, McLean County Autism Society, and the Life Center

for Independent Living. During these events, police officers explain the program and answer any questions the attendees may have.

Further, patrol officers sometimes encounter a person they feel may qualify for or benefit from the program. In these instances, they will provide a brochure and explain the registration procedures.

Within the first 6 months of launching ENP, over 200 local residents registered. On numerous occasions, responding officers received notification of medical or special needs information prior to arriving at the scene of a call. This resulted in a safer environment for both officers and citizens. To date, no unfortunate outcomes have occurred.



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## Program to Law

During its summer 2009 session, the state legislature passed the Illinois Premise Alert Act (IL-PAA) (PA 96-0788), which requires public safety agencies within the state that maintain a CAD system to initiate a premise alert program (PAP) to maintain information on individuals with special needs within their coverage area. This act was signed into law on August 28, 2009, and sets forth several requirements.

- Agencies must publicize the program and accept notifications from the individuals, their families, or caregivers.
- Authorities then must identify and remain aware of these situations when responding to calls or encountering individuals. Public safety agencies also must maintain the database, including the persons' name, date of birth, phone number, address, and employment locations when possible.
- Officials should obtain written permission from an authorized parent or caregiver before entering the information in the database.
- Agencies should verify the special need reported through statements from the individual, caregivers, family members, friends, or medical personnel.
- Organizations that share CAD systems must disseminate the information among members of the system. Any information sent to an agency in error is to be forwarded to the proper agency.

- The information stored in the CAD system shall be renewed every 2 years or when it changes.

## Conclusion

Statistics indicate that in the course of their duties, police officers may encounter individuals with severe mental conditions. Of course, law enforcement personnel will handle these precarious situations most effectively when they have the necessary information pertaining to these individuals.

To this end, the Normal, Illinois, Police Department's Early Notification Program has filled an important need for the community. Now, officers can resolve these situations while protecting themselves and maintaining the safety of the subject and the community. ♦

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**Statistics indicate that in the course of their duties, police officers may encounter individuals with severe mental conditions.**

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## Endnotes

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<sup>3</sup> Information gathered during this process must remain strictly confidential and can be used only to assist emergency medical and police responders. The statute prohibits personnel from violating the confidentiality clause and, further, informs citizens of their right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights, if they believe their privacy rights are violated.

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*Chief Crutcher heads the Normal, Illinois, Police Department.*

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# ***Vicarious Traumatization and Spirituality in Law Enforcement***

By LYNN A. TOVAR, Ed.D.



**I**t is no secret that police work causes many law enforcement officers to feel stressed. Patrol officers face the risk of violence on a daily basis, leading many people to consider law enforcement an inherently stressful occupation.<sup>1</sup> Also, specific duties within police departments, such as child abuse investigations, may cause more anguish than others.

Yet, the mental toll of these positions often is overlooked,

and, generally, the source of this anguish is examined anecdotally rather than empirically. Law enforcement administrators need to take a closer look at how traumatic events can alter their employees' world views and senses of spirituality, which ultimately affects the well-being of both personnel and organizations.

A positive spirit can help police officers reduce work-related stress by allowing them to minimize the impact of traumatic

experiences. Therefore, managers and training coordinators need to acknowledge their critical role in changing the behaviors and attitudes related to workplace stress by developing wellness and spirituality programs for their agencies. Understanding this stress, its sources and effects, and various ways to combat it will enrich officers' quality of life. Effective training programs and a culture of spirituality help officers manage

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stress, respond to trauma, and lead a more satisfying life.<sup>2</sup>

### PEOPLE-ORIENTED OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Stress is an inevitable component of life. In our fast-paced society, individuals must respond to a barrage of problems and changes in a timely manner, take on greater responsibilities, and become increasingly more efficient at their jobs.<sup>3</sup> However, in addition to this common, unavoidable stress, law enforcement work presents more challenges by frequently exposing personnel to traumatic events. As a result, police work meets the definition of a “critical occupation.” Personnel in critical occupations, such as firefighters, paramedics, ambulance drivers, rescue workers, and emergency medical response teams, deal with traumatic events and their consequences. Officers, along with these emergency services professionals, play a critical role to protect the community, a weighty responsibility that brings significant pressure.<sup>4</sup> Those who do not learn to cope with this anguish progress to a more severe stage of stress known as burnout.<sup>5</sup>

### VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION

The concept of vicarious traumatization, as introduced by McCann and Pearlman,

provides a theoretical framework to understand the complicated and often painful effects of trauma on crisis workers.<sup>6</sup> By definition, “the effects of vicarious traumatization on an individual resemble those of traumatic experiences. They include significant disruptions in one’s affect tolerance, psychological needs, beliefs about self and others, interpersonal relationships, and sensory memory, including imagery.”<sup>7</sup>

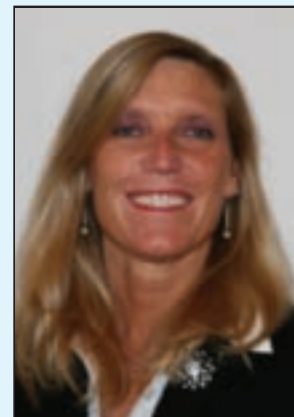
Vicarious traumatization results from empathetic engagement with traumatic experiences.<sup>8</sup> Tragic events that harm innocent victims are, unfortunately, an inevitable part of our larger world and society. Because law enforcement officers hold the responsibility of responding to these incidents, they repeatedly witness human

beings’ intentional cruelty to one another. As investigators listen to graphic accounts of victims’ experiences and participate in reenactments of tragic events, these encounters stir powerful emotions as officers engage with victims’ pain and suffering. Officers can become painfully aware of the potential for trauma in their own lives, and this empathetic engagement leaves them vulnerable to the emotional and spiritual effects of vicarious traumatization.

Officers who fall victim to vicarious traumatization may demonstrate changes in their core sense of self or psychological foundation. These alterations include shifts in the officers’ identities and world-views; their ability to manage strong feelings, maintain a positive sense of self, and connect

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*Dr. Tovar retired as a commander from the Elk Grove Village, Illinois, Police Department and currently serves as an associate professor in the Justice, Law, and Public Safety Studies Department at Lewis University in Romeoville, Illinois.*

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with others; their spirituality or sense of meaning, expectation, awareness, and connection; and their basic needs for safety, self-esteem, trust, dependency, control, and intimacy.<sup>9</sup> These effects, which disrupt officers' professional and personal lives, are cumulative and potentially permanent.

## A STUDY OF VICARIOUS TRAUMA

### Focused Research

To investigate how vicarious trauma manifests in law enforcement agencies, the author studied the ways that officers deal with these painful and horrific experiences that completely contradict their previously held conceptions about how the world should be. The study examined how law enforcement officers reconcile these disruptions to their core beliefs (e.g., good versus evil, hope versus despair, safety versus vulnerability) and manage the physical, psychological, and social ramifications of vicarious trauma. The study analyzed the sources and effects of these stresses, as well as the ways in which the participants reconstructed their lives to regain their psychological and physical health. Also, the author presents suggestions on how organizations can assist police officers in their struggles, particularly

by encouraging them to learn wellness and spirituality-based coping mechanisms.

To gather this information, the author interviewed 15 law enforcement investigators from the Chicago area who worked on juvenile sexual abuse cases. She asked questions to determine how, if at all, the interviewees were influenced or changed by their professional experiences. Face-to-face interviews afforded her the opportunity to observe the participant's body language, such as

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***The concept of vicarious traumatization...provides a theoretical framework to understand the complicated and often painful effects of trauma on crisis workers.***

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eye rolls, long pauses between responses, or voice inflections that indicated contempt, concern, frustration, or sorrow. Narrative interviews illustrated to the author how various episodes, experiences, or events in officers' lives impacted their feelings, emotions, coping mechanisms, and interactions with peers and victims.

### Lessons Learned

The study's results indicated that participants exhibited numerous signs of vicarious traumatization, including hypervigilance, symptomatic reactions, relationship problems, lack of communication, denial, repression, isolation and disassociation, change in worldviews, and a loss of sense of meaning. Participants' statements clearly demonstrated the impacts of juvenile sexual assault investigations in their lives. The first interviewee stated, “I think that is a part of what this job has done to me. You look at society or you look at people with a jaundiced-eye, cynical perspective. We don't always see the best, we see the worst, or we have suspicion about someone.” One interviewee described the physical effects of psychological trauma, such as “headaches, the general tightness in the shoulders. I don't sleep well. I haven't slept well in a very long time. When I wake up in the morning, I never feel refreshed.”

Also, as is common of vicarious traumatization victims, some subjects demonstrated significant changes to their previously held values. Another interviewee stated, “I think before I got on the job and people would ask, ‘Do you believe in God?’ I would say, ‘Yeah, I believe in Him, but I just don't go to church.’ Now

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when people ask if I believe, I will say, 'If you saw what I saw—and I spent 2 hours in Children's Memorial Hospital—and if you saw what I saw... there is no God.' Yeah, I would say it has had an impact on my belief." The investigators demonstrated that their experiences permanently transformed their lives, both professionally and personally; as a result, new perspectives, new beliefs, and coping strategies emerged. Also, investigators who felt most distant from traumatic experiences were more open in their acknowledgement of their effects and more able to critically reflect on them.<sup>10</sup>

### **POSITIVE STEPS TO ACTION**

These results demonstrate that law enforcement agencies must take measures to help their personnel combat the negative effects of occupational stress and vicarious traumatization. Two important methods to improve the well-being of officers include facilitating spirituality in the workplace and implementing training programs to teach coping mechanisms.

### **Spirituality in the Workplace**

What is spirituality in the workplace? In this study, the author ascribes to a broad definition of the term. "Spirituality" does not denote religious practices, God, or theology but

rather an inherent human awareness of the elusive impact of experience. It attributes meaning to one's life through hope and idealism, connection with others, and awareness of experience. More specifically, "workplace spirituality recognizes that people have an inner life that nourishes and is nourished by meaningful work in the context of community."<sup>11</sup>

The organization should remain concerned about how officers' work affects their inner lives and emotions and, thus, foster a culture that welcomes spirituality as a coping mechanism. The four cultural characteristics of a spiritual organization include a strong sense of purpose, trust and respect among coworkers, humanistic work practices, and the toleration of employee expression in the workplace.<sup>12</sup> An awareness of spirituality can shed a great deal of light on the officers' behavior in the workplace; as a result, the organizational culture that accepts spirituality can better help

employees develop to their full potential.<sup>13</sup>

Because many individuals desire to embrace spirituality in their personal life and in their workplace, organizations can promote a spiritual culture by emphasizing the value of community in a productive work environment.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, law enforcement agencies need to recognize that their employees have both a mind and a spirit, and they seek to find meaning in their duties and the community they serve. Many police officers feel the desire and commitment to connect with other humans,





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whether inside the workplace or externally, including the citizens and victims they help. A strong sense of spirituality in the workplace promotes positive attitudes, health, happiness, empowerment, inner peace, truth, and healthy relationships.

### **Wellness Training**

Once law enforcement administrators recognize the link between wellness and overall personnel development, they should provide training opportunities to teach officers how to cope with stress on the job. These educational programs will function as both professional and personal development for officers who suffer from vicarious traumatization.

Before administrators develop wellness programs for their departments, they should perform a two-part training needs assessment. First, managers should analyze the current state of wellness training in their agencies. Then, they must understand the severity of occupational stress among their officers. They should ask questions, such as, How has your work affected your personal identity, spirituality, sexuality, relationships, and emotional responsiveness? Does your work lead to feelings of frustration and hopelessness or to joy and accomplishment? What programs does the organization have in place to help officers deal with these changes?

After agencies gain a better understanding of their needs, they can develop educational programs to remedy these issues. Trainers should instruct officers about the causes and effects of stress, as well as constructive ways to combat it. A well-rounded stress reduction/spirituality curriculum should provide information about stress indicators, the benefits of physical exercise and proper nutrition, and effective interpersonal communication methods.<sup>15</sup>

***“This training will help officers overcome stress and constructively respond to vicarious traumatization by showing them methods to incorporate wellness and spirituality into their lives.”***

Departments should implement prevention measures by immediately educating new recruits on stress and wellness. However, continuing instruction becomes even more important for officers later in their careers; these experienced officers more likely will suffer from the effects of stress already.

As a result, agencies must provide support for their personnel, which can come in many forms. Support from the officer's agency and family is a critical factor in a troubled person's decision to seek help. Many administrators institute employee assistance programs to provide 24-hour help lines and confidential counseling.

In addition, psychological debriefings comprise an important technique to help personnel cope with traumatic events. Conducting debriefings soon after incidents allows police officers to express their feelings and discuss the occurrence in a supportive group setting.<sup>16</sup> Also, peer support groups allow officers who have been affected by trauma to talk to fellow law enforcement professionals who will listen to them and provide assistance. Trainers and administrators must understand, however, that many law enforcement officers fear that acknowledging such stress impacts their work and, thus, may not seek help on their own.

Last, administrators must acknowledge that each law enforcement agency is unique and has its own set of stress-related problems. It, therefore, is necessary to conduct ongoing assessments into the causes and minimization of stress among their officers.

## CONCLUSION

Law enforcement officials should seek a greater understanding of the toll that work-related stress has on police officers. Organizations have begun to recognize that occupational stress and vicarious traumatization pose serious hazards for their workers' mental health; as such, they need to consider facilitating wellness and spirituality programs in the workplace.<sup>17</sup> These programs are positive, proactive ways to address the deeper impact of police work on officers' lives.

Training coordinators and administrators need to understand the day-to-day events of the patrol officers, specialized investigators, and other personnel who struggle with repeated exposure to trauma in their lives. Then, they can provide their employees with appropriate professional development and training opportunities to remedy these issues. This training will help officers overcome stress and constructively respond to vicarious traumatization by showing them methods to incorporate wellness and spirituality into their lives.<sup>18</sup>

As many law enforcement agencies across the country downsize due to budget cuts, layoffs, or attrition, it remains critical to focus on retaining effective, hardworking officers. Therefore, organizations should consider the above philosophies and approach training in a holistic manner. In a workplace where training and development

foster a culture of wellness and spirituality, employees will individually and collectively begin to create, relate, and experience a richer, dynamic, and more meaningful life, both professionally and personally. ♦

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Len Tischler, "The Growing Interest in Spirituality in Business," *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 12, no. 4 (1999): 273-279.

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## *Felony Cases in Large Urban Counties*

The Bureau of Justice Statistics has released *Felony Defendants in Large Urban Counties, 2006*. The document contains data collected from a representative sample of felony cases filed in the nation's 75 most populous counties during May 2006. To provide a complete overview of the processing of felony defendants from filing to disposition and sentencing, nonmurder cases are tracked for 1 year and murder cases are tracked for 2 years. Data collected include current arrest charges, demographic characteristics, prior arrests and convictions, criminal justice status at time of arrest, type of pretrial release or detention, bail amount, court appearance record, adjudication outcome, and conviction sentence received. This periodic report has been published biennially since 1990.

Highlights reveal that about a fourth of felony defendants were charged with a violent offense in 2006; 43 percent of felony defendants had at least one prior felony conviction; and about a third of released defendants committed some form of pretrial misconduct, including 18 percent who were rearrested for a new offense committed while they awaited disposition of their case. Part of the *Felony Defendants in Large Urban Counties Series*, the publication (NCJ 228944) can be accessed at <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2193>.

## *Foreclosed and Abandoned Properties*

*Addressing Foreclosed and Abandoned Properties*, a fact sheet sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, offers an array of ideas to address vacant and abandoned properties. The strategies in this guide, which have been culled from real-life approaches across the United States, are intended to assist law enforcement and government agencies seeking to prevent property abandonment and lessen problems, such as crime and increased demand for municipal services, when abandonment occurs. The document (NCJ 230184) can be accessed via the National Criminal Justice Reference Service's Web site, <http://www.ncjrs>.



## *CIRCLE Project*

The Comprehensive Indian Resources for Community and Law Enforcement (CIRCLE) Project was a collaborative effort between several U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) agencies and three tribes—the Northern Cheyenne, the Oglala Sioux, and the Pueblo of Zuni—to improve criminal justice systems within these communities by reducing crime and increasing safety. The National Institute of Justice sponsored a 48-month participatory evaluation of the CIRCLE Project. All of the project stakeholders were deeply involved in the evaluation. Researchers worked closely with federal and tribal partners to learn how effective the CIRCLE Project was in improving tribal criminal justice systems and to what extent DOJ succeeded in helping the tribes.

Given the tribes' diverse approaches toward the broad goals of reducing crime and improving safety, evaluators examined the accomplishments of each tribe individually and in significant detail. However, they did draw some general lessons from their specific findings.

First, addressing sustainability at the beginning helps tribes plan their changes according to projected long-term effects. In addition, tribal partners wanted the CIRCLE Project to support self-determination, including the freedom to shape tribal institutions and design changes tailored to the particular needs of their communities. Evaluators also recognized the great need in system reform for nation building and creating criminal justice processes that are culturally fitting. Finally, one of the most important lessons from the evaluation concerns the approach that agencies take to justice system enhancements in Indian Country. Local data gathering and an understanding of conditions specific to locale help to identify opportunities for action. While not all tribes are ready for system-level changes, this should not deter them from making targeted changes on a smaller scale. This more incremental course saves money, time, and effort and can lead to long-term success.

To read the full report (NCJ 221081), access the National Criminal Justice Reference Service's Web site, <http://www.ncjrs.gov>.



## Perspective



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### ***Violent True Believers***

By J. Reid Meloy, Ph.D.

**V**iolent true believers (VTBs) are committed, or apparently so, to an ideology or belief system that advances the killing of self and others as a legitimate means of furthering a particular goal.<sup>1</sup> They are convinced that their truth is absolute and that no acceptable alternatives exist.<sup>2</sup> Violence, their method of change, will include homicide, suicide, or both. They commit such acts instrumentally, in the service of advancing the cause.<sup>3</sup> Soldiers and police officers differ from VTBs; although, perhaps, also willing to die, they behave in a lawful context.<sup>4</sup> The three principles of *jus in bello*—acceptable wartime conduct—include proportionality, responsibility, and discrimination and apply to soldiers and police

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officers, not to VTBs.<sup>5</sup> Suicide accompanied by mass killings of civilians represents one method by which VTBs further their political, religious, or social goals; but, suicide is not necessary to fit the definition of a VTB.<sup>6</sup>

VTBs, such as members of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), may base their ideology or belief system on a nationalist-separatist attitude concerned with seeking certain political and territorial gains or, as in the case of groups like Hamas or al Qaeda, on a theocratic attitude that seeks to promulgate worldwide a particular religious movement that ignores national or territorial boundaries.<sup>7</sup>

VTBs are terrorists, not activists who obey the law while protesting a grievance or extremists who break the law nonviolently to further a political, religious, or social objective.<sup>8</sup>

VTBs may operate alone, in an autonomous cell, or as part of a hierarchical organization. The accentuation of the individual or group depends on the degree that society emphasizes the autonomy of the single person or the power of the collective. For example, in the United States over the past decade, VTBs have included individuals like Timothy McVeigh, who believed that bombing the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, would make him the first hero of the second American Revolution.<sup>9</sup> Internationally, members of groups, such as Hamas or al Qaeda, emphasize, for instance, that the intentional homicide-suicide of particular individuals as one method of attack will allow them to take their place among a *group* of true believers or martyrs that have preceded them. Economic and social

rewards also may be showered on family members left behind.

However, just as all individuals who ascribe to certain beliefs have their own personalities and unique backgrounds, VTBs all do not fit a particular mold. Psychology authorities long have known that all persons are both the same and different. One scientific method, referred to as classification or typology, helps to address this reality by sorting individuals into subgroups based upon certain shared characteristics while also emphasizing the differences among each group. Placing individuals into certain types furthers communication and understanding.

From a law enforcement or intelligence perspective, the development of types could help personnel refine their interview and interrogation techniques. To this end, the author offers different categories of VTBs and provides for each an overall description, identifies specific needs/sensitivities, and suggests appropriate interview approaches. The proposed types, based upon the research and ex-

perience of members of the law enforcement and intelligence communities, include unwavering true believers, affiliative true believers, opportunistic true believers, criminal true believers, betrayer true believers, psychotic true believers, and fledgling true believers.

### Unwavering True Believers

This category consists of hard-core true believers motivated by deeply held, rigid beliefs that they consider completely justified. Those who base their beliefs on religion feel certain that they act

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**From a law enforcement or intelligence perspective, the development of types could help personnel refine their interview and interrogation techniques.**

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as agents of their god, who sanctions the killing they participate in. For years, these VTBs study the books of their faith and commit to memory certain phrases and passages that justify their homicidal-suicidal intent. They ignore passages that contradict these actions. Such individuals do not think that their tightly held rationalizations are open to debate or questioning. In fact, they consider critical thinking forbidden and may believe that persons who exercise this skill are unbelievers worthy of death. Unwavering true believers hold in high regard and consider a measure of their commitment their absolute belief in the righteousness of their cause and the means by which they carry it out.

They have a deeply held sense of their own perfection and are quite narcissistic. However, this differs from the typical Western version of arrogance and abrasiveness. These individuals feel quietly certain of their destiny. They have an internalized, larger-than-life vision of who they are and the destined role they will play in the life-or-death drama unfolding before them. Their thinking operates on the principle of purpose, not cause. For example, floods or earthquakes do not result from changes in the weather or shifts in the earth's tectonic plates. Rather, they serve the purpose of eliminating certain lands or peoples. At a most primitive level, unwavering true believers may receive directions from their own dreams. They draw sustenance from their internal beliefs and images and do not consciously need external sources of gratification, such as money, power, or sex. These VTBs usually display understated visible symbols of authority and may be quite ascetic.



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They have learned to do without worldly comforts, choosing instead to practice self-discipline and to further the development of their spirituality.

Unwavering true believers may appear paranoid and, perhaps, entertain an irrational fear of imminent assault or believe that others are aggressing against them. This internal psychological operation, based upon their ability to attribute their own aggression to others, allows them to kill other people without ambivalence because their violence always is defensive in their minds.

They often see themselves as warriors, and, in this hypermasculine world, women function only as reproductive vehicles and caretakers of the next generation of warriors. Sexual activity for pleasure and affection is condemned. Women generally are not trusted, and their erotic appeal—rather than males' sexual aggression—must be contained and controlled at all costs.

They likely have superior intelligence and, perhaps, advanced academic degrees. Despite such successes, they shun worldly possessions and criticize those who use their education to further their access to worldly goods. Their life is one of sacrifice, and they often have severed relations with their family, who also may have rejected them. Instead, they assume the role of a benevolent father figure, and their followers become a substitute family.

Unwavering true believers' condemnation of those who do not believe is simple, absolute, and complete. In silence, they will demean interviewers as unbelievers and look for ways in which the behavior of those interviewing them justifies their

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criticism. They may watch with great vigilance, but little fanfare, the interviewer's manners and customs, searching for telltale signs of gullibility and ignorance. They will assume interviewers have no knowledge of the VTBs' cause or mission; displays of this lack of knowledge will amuse them and further elevate their sense of specialness and perfection.

Although they ascribe to the homicidal-suicidal strategy in the furtherance of their cause, if they have attained a certain amount of power and influence through their charisma, they may command that others die so that they remain in a position of leadership. They do not acknowledge the selfishness of this decision. Instead, they will justify it as a more potent means of furthering their beliefs.

They have few needs and probably will not provide accurate information or intelligence. Unwavering true believers want or need little in the way of creature comforts. They simply will desire access to their religious books. There is little likelihood of a psychiatric or psychological diagnosis other than, perhaps, a personality disorder. These individuals have learned to contain and control emotion unless they want to use it to intimidate their adversary—the interviewer. They do not depend on attachments or bonds to other believers. These VTBs most easily can be identified because of the tenacity of their beliefs and the effort others expend to listen to them. They will hold a leadership position, and others may view them as blessed with a certain specialness or religious role without the commensurate formal education. Older individuals of this type recognize that acts

of homicidal and suicidal violence most likely will be carried out by young males—the focus of their recruitment efforts.

Interviewers should learn as much as possible about unwavering true believers' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes before meeting with them and then adopt the student's stance: "I want to learn from you and understand your beliefs." They may remain silent but, over time, may begin to talk in response to genuine interest. Tirades—intense, angry emotional expressions against their enemies—may occur and should be tolerated. Recordings of such events may yield factual admissions when

carefully studied. Interviewers should use caution when complimenting them and bolstering their ego or these VTBs quickly will recognize the manipulation. Personnel conducting interviews should acknowledge any cultural differences as "new things to be learned." Confrontation and threats typically will not work and will only solidify the unwavering true believers' silence.

#### **Affiliative True Believers**

Generally anxious and dependent on others, these individuals have joined the group to participate in the movement or cause primarily as followers. Often, these VTBs bond intensely to the leadership and, like a plant, need an external energy source. They tend to idealize others, putting them on a pedestal, and, typically, have a history of feeling disappointed and damaged by people they have looked up to in the past. Such believers respond in a very strong, positive, and emotional manner to older individuals who are nurturing and authoritative.

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**VTBs may  
operate alone,  
in an autonomous  
cell, or as part  
of a hierarchical  
organization.**

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Affiliative true believers often remain emotionally close to family members; however, like the unwavering true believer, they may feel angry toward them. Perhaps, these believers are the “black sheep” among their siblings. They probably have average intelligence and are prone to feeling depressed when removed from their group of “brothers.” These individuals need careful handling and direction when carrying out a homicide-suicide mission but likely are easy recruits due to their dependency needs and desire to belong. Often, periods of sadness with suicidal thoughts characterize their history; the latter desires to kill themselves have been re-defined as a source of pride in their training for martyrdom. Such thoughts of death are bolstered by grandiose fantasies of joining other martyrs in an idealized place guaranteeing sexual bliss.

They need many friends and at least one authority figure. Such believers likely will suffer from anxiety and depression when removed from those they depend upon emotionally. Their so-called extremist beliefs are nowhere near as solidified as those of the unwavering true believer and take second place to their emotional needs.

Ideally, an older male figure familiar with the family dynamics and culture of the individual will take a warm and affectionate, yet dominant approach to the interview. Much time with this type of believer will yield a bond, and one interviewer consistently should visit with these VTBs to stimulate the relationship. When an emotional connection is made, their beliefs easily can be influenced because these are secondary to their desire for attachment to others. These individuals

also may be willing to join a larger, more powerful group.

### **Opportunistic True Believers**

Like the unwavering true believer, these VTBs are self-important but have joined the cause to enhance their wealth, power, control, property, dominance over subordinates, and other “narcissistic supplies.” Although they appear autonomous, they actually depend heavily on others for attention and admiration. In extreme cases, they want worship and look for followers and admirers to exploit. They can form attachments to others but not as intensively as the affiliative true believer.

For these individuals, the cause is themselves. They have no particular interest in violence and do not want to sacrifice their lives. The beliefs driving the mission of their group are secondary to their opportunistic desires and easily abandoned. They may be charismatic and eager to be the center of atten-

tion. Among these individuals, intelligence varies widely depending on education and background, but values are not important in any deep or abiding sense. They are willing to alter them given changes in opportunities. Their roles in the group will vary from handling minor players to controlling the group’s money.

They need attention and admiration and depend on others to provide these. When such narcissistic supplies are not provided to them, they will become angry and sullen. They will have unmet desires (e.g., money, self-importance) that investigators can identify and use to recruit them. They may want certain things provided to their family.



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There unlikely will be a psychiatric condition other than a personality disorder.

Interviewers can use flattery to let them know that others clearly see their attributes. A younger interviewer eager to learn from them can provide these accolades. Much time and attention should focus on understanding their personal history and its relationship to their present circumstances, with a keen eye to identifying their unmet desires. These VTBs also may conceal feelings of being betrayed or cheated by other members of their group, usually those above them in the hierarchy. They may respond to direct offers.

### **Criminal True Believers**

These are the “berserkers” of the group.<sup>10</sup> In milder variations, they will have a checkered criminal history of both violent and nonviolent offenses. Perhaps, they were gang members or street thugs. In severe cases, they will be psychopaths who take pleasure in committing violence and frightening the other members of the group. They also are sensation seekers and will carry out the most risky acts against the enemy. Other group members typically do not completely trust these VTBs because of their impulsive behaviors (e.g., emotional explosiveness, petty stealing). They also have the shortest lifespan in the organization; they either are forcefully removed from or killed by the group due to their unpredictable behavior.

“Criminal true believer” actually is a misnomer. They do not have any true beliefs, do not waste time thinking about or memorizing religious texts, and are interested only in action. They want to engage in jihad and are happiest when in battle.

Always believing in their own invincibility, they will be fearless in combat and will take risks that astound even their enemies. However, they have no interest in personal suicide to further the cause. They rather would just kill others.

Emotionally detached, they do not form bonds. They take pride in being a loner and prefer to be alone. This makes other members of the group uncomfortable. These VTBs spend time in solitary very well. They are like the opportunistic true believer, always focused on short-term gratification (e.g., food, sex, alcohol and other drugs, or pleasure through the dominance of another). They do not have long-term goals and do not reflect on the past.

Leaders often use them for internal discipline within the group, and these VTBs may know the darkest secrets of other members and use this knowledge against them. Groups recruit criminal true believers for their muscle and use them at the last minute for terrorist activity; if they are around too long, intelligence and discipline will suffer.

These believers often find gratifying their short-term desires sufficient reason to betray others. These individuals are chronically angry. They do not foresee the long-term consequences of their actions; therefore, their postoffense planning is poor. Their Achilles’ heel is their sense of invincibility, especially in battle. They will take physical risks that put themselves in extreme jeopardy.

Interviewers will find that short-term threats probably will not work, although these VTBs may have historically betrayed others for money, drugs, excitement, and power. They are the most

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**VTBs are terrorists, not activists who obey the law while protesting a grievance or extremists who break the law nonviolently to further a political, religious, or social objective.**

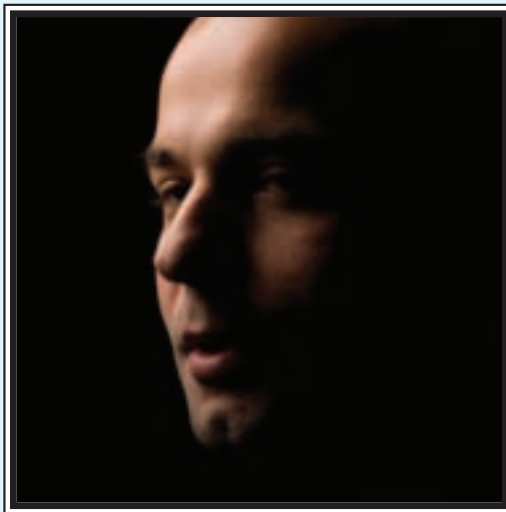
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dangerous of all of the VTB types for both reactive, emotional violence and more planned, unemotional (predatory) violence. Physical security is paramount when interviewing them. They will not establish a relationship with any emotional meaning; therefore, interviewers will waste time if trying to do this. They will attack or betray anyone if the “price” is right. Typically, they will be one of the most physically muscular members of the group and younger in age than most. Positive incentives that focus on their creature comforts work best.

### **Betrayer True Believers**

Although not particularly wedded to a belief or a mission, these individuals know whom they hate and whom they want to betray. In this negative belief structure, the emotional focus is on revenge against someone who has hurt them or someone close to them. They feel victimized by past events and, typically, are quite passive. Although angry, they keep this hidden from others while planning acts of aggression to be carried out indirectly. These individuals are ideological assassins. They love duping or conning others. However, they fear direct aggression because it may stimulate a direct attack on themselves. Psychologists refer to this as a “passive-aggressive” personality. Their sense of betrayal likely is old, not tied to any current situation, and rooted in early family relationships (e.g., an alcoholic, physically abusive father). Initially, they may seem arrogant and condescending, but, as interviewers spend time with these individuals, their inadequacies and low self-esteem become more apparent.



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Initially, interviewers should appeal to these individuals' fragile narcissism. They should look for ways to admire them and mirror their passive-aggressive style of relating. Investigators can identify ways in which others have betrayed these individuals in the past and try to empathically understand their anger. They should be careful not to injure their self-esteem, which, despite their arrogance, is quite fragile. This is the most difficult type of VTB to identify, and, at first, interviewers may misidentify them as another type, such as an opportunistic true believer. Investigators must remain wary of these individuals' manipulations to betray them.

### **Psychotic True Believers**

A psychiatrist or psychologist would diagnose these individuals with a major mental disorder, which, typically, manifests in severe abnormalities of perception, thinking, or mood. Symptoms may include auditory or visual hallucinations (hearing or seeing things that do not exist) or delusions (paranoid or persecutory fixed and false beliefs). Dozens of psychiatric diagnoses for these disorders exist, but common ones in this setting include various types of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder (formerly called manic depression). Psychiatric disorders occur in a certain portion of the population throughout the world, regardless of race, ethnicity, or nationality.

Unfortunately, extremist beliefs, especially of a religious nature, may fit easily into the delusions of a person with a mental illness. For example, such people may believe that a certain leader is a prophet or an incarnation of a god. Delusions are

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fixed and false, just as literal translations of religious texts can be the absolute truth in the mind of the true believer despite their falsity. Individuals with mental illness who believe they are a prophet and who receive auditory hallucinations commanding them to kill unbelievers may carry out this task with a certainty and vigor that other true believers can only wish for.

However, in stressful situations, like combat or captivity, individuals with mental illness will decompensate—they begin to fall apart. Fanatical religious beliefs become fantastic and bizarre, voices they hear begin to turn on and persecute them, their mood swings become more rapid and dramatic, they begin to disregard personal hygiene, and they behave in ways that provoke anxiety in others (e.g., smearing feces, talking to their voices). When this occurs, their so-called brothers typically will tease them and reject them from the group. The more criminal and anti-social members will exploit them in ways, such as stealing their food or clothing.

Psychotic true believers fear others, cannot cope with even moderate stress, and exhibit unpredictable behavior. Interviewers should meet their desire for safety; this can entail basic caretaking, such as food, shelter, clothing, and protection from others. Unfortunately, they are a poor source of credible information as it likely is distorted and mixed with delusions and hallucinations. Interviewers can have a difficult time sorting true and false information during interviews with these individuals.

Interviewers should isolate them from the others and psychiatrically treat them, either in a

hospital or on an outpatient basis. Gratitude for such treatment eventually may yield an alliance with the interviewer and credible information. Most major mental disorders will respond to appropriate medical treatment. Even severely mentally ill individuals have a capacity to form an emotional bond with the interviewer.

### Fledgling True Believers

Fledgling true believers consist of immature or inexperienced persons, children, or adolescents who eventually may become one of the other six types of VTBs. Apparently, these individuals take shape in two ways: through personal suffering or indoctrination.

Personal suffering may be manifest through a history of physical abuse or neglect within the family or through its members' hardships through personal loss or economic deprivation inflicted by others. In both cases, the child learns to hate, and parents, teachers, religious leaders, or other childhood friends reveal and teach the target of that

hatred. If the suffering originates from one of the parents, children easily become convinced that another person or institution is to blame. They will protect their parents at all costs.

Indoctrination can range from mild social pressure from parents and teachers to learn certain "facts" that represent the reality of the world to intensive programming, or brainwashing. Often coming into play are the characteristics of a cult: physical deprivation, isolation, peer group pressure, a charismatic leader, a reward system, and the devaluation of an identified enemy constantly

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**Law enforcement  
officers want to  
understand and, thus,  
deal effectively with  
today's violent true  
believer.**

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are used to instill hatred for a people or country the child has not seen. This is a less-deeply conditioned route to violent true belief than personal suffering and, therefore, is more amenable to change as the child grows up and has exposure to alternative perspectives and ways of life.

Fledgling true believers still are children. Even though their beliefs appear complete and absolute, they are not. They also are vulnerable to all of the desires held by children and adolescents: safety, security, stimulation, love, and attention. Their typical outlook for the future is saturated with their own inflated sense of power and control, yet their daily behavior may be impulsive and not a product of careful thought. They may entertain private fantasies that will not be revealed easily yet are reinforced by their handlers in the community. For example, their martyrdom will make them a hero, and their family will be taken care of after they die. Peer pressure is most powerful during adolescence, and they will want to join the group that has the most prestige among their peers.

They need adult attention, supervision, and control. If they personally have suffered, they may be diagnosed with a traumatic disorder, other anxiety disorder, or depression requiring mental health care. If they are a product of indoctrination, continuous exposure over time to other sources of gratification and views of the world may work. Employing one authoritative and caring adult willing to spend time with them and develop a bond will prove the most useful approach to gaining the child's trust and, perhaps, gathering useful information.

## Conclusion

Law enforcement officers want to understand and, thus, deal effectively with today's violent true believer. To this end, based on law enforcement and intelligence experience, the author offers these seven proposed types of violent true believers. This area continues to evolve; no typology is

complete, and these types may change based on new information.

Gaining additional understanding of these individuals can help interviewers obtain information that can help keep this nation safe. As this knowledge increases, other needs/sensitivities and interview approaches may be identified in the future. ♦

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> J.R. Meloy, K. Mohandie, A. Hempel, and A. Shiva, "The Violent True Believer: Homicidal and Suicidal States of Mind," *Journal of Threat Assessment* 1 (2001): 1-14.

<sup>2</sup> A. Bringuel, D. Gemeinhardt, G. Weaver, and J. Janowicz, "Spotting and Assessing Potential Confidential Human Sources Using the Group Analysis Protocol (GAP)," in *Terrorism Research & Analysis Project (TRAP): A Collection of Thoughts, Ideas, and Perspectives Vol. 1*, ed. A. Bringuel, J. Janowicz, A. Valida, and E. Reid (Washington, DC: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010), 111-148.

<sup>3</sup> J.R. Meloy, "The Empirical Basis and Forensic Application of Affective and Predatory Violence," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry* 40 (2006): 539-547.

<sup>4</sup> Bringuel, Gemeinhardt, Weaver, and Janowicz.

<sup>5</sup> Bringuel. Acceptable wartime conduct results from legal convention (treaties) and custom and is found in the contemporary Geneva Conventions I – IV (1949) and subsequent protocols. It also is historically described in both Christian and Islamic writings.

<sup>6</sup> Bringuel, Gemeinhardt, Weaver, and Janowicz.

<sup>7</sup> R. Robins and J. Post, *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); M. Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); and Y. Bodansky, *Bin Laden: The Man Who Declared War on America* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Bringuel, Gemeinhardt, Weaver, and Janowicz.

<sup>9</sup> K.M. Puckett, "The Lone Terrorist" (study for the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, 2001); and J.R. Meloy, "Indirect Personality Assessment of the Violent True Believer," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 82 (2004): 138-146.

<sup>10</sup> Berserkers were members of the ancient Viking communities who were used as bodyguards and warriors when needed.

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*Dr. Meloy welcomes reader questions and comments. He can be reached via e-mail at reidmeloy@gmail.com.*

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## Bulletin Notes

Law enforcement officers are challenged daily in the performance of their duties; they face each challenge freely and unselfishly while answering the call to duty. In certain instances, their actions warrant special attention from their respective departments. The *Bulletin* also wants to recognize those situations that transcend the normal rigors of the law enforcement profession.



Corporal Roane

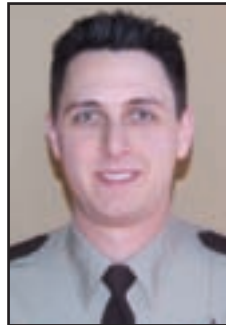
Patrol Corporal Michael C. Roane of the Augusta County, Virginia, Sheriff's Office received a call for service at a private residence. A 911 caller had reported that she had found her mother and 17-year-old brother unconscious in their home. Within 4 minutes of receiving the call, Corporal Roane arrived at the scene, entered the house, and immediately noticed a strong odor emanating from the residence. He quickly located the mother and her son crumpled in a bed and suspected they had fallen unconscious due to fume inhalation. Corporal Roane carried both victims outside to safety where they later were revived. Investigation revealed that a grill near the back of the home had emitted carbon monoxide fumes, raising the CO level of the home to deadly levels.



Deputy Harris



Deputy Linehan



Deputy Wieland

On one cold February morning, Deputies Tim Harris, Shane Linehan, and Matt Wieland of the Washington County, Minnesota, Police Department heard a man call for help. The officers headed to a river where they found an individual who had broken through the ice as he attempted to drive across the frozen water. Given the 9°F air temperature and frigid

water, the man would perish unless removed from the water immediately. As the ice continued to break beneath the officers, they lay on their stomachs and formed a human chain to pull the victim out of the water. The deputies navigated through the dangerous, cracking ice to pull the man to the shore, where rescue personnel transported him to a local hospital.

Nominations for the *Bulletin Notes* should be based on either the rescue of one or more citizens or arrest(s) made at unusual risk to an officer's safety. Submissions should include a short write-up (maximum of 250 words), a separate photograph of each nominee, and a letter from the department's ranking officer endorsing the nomination. Submissions can be mailed to the Editor, *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, FBI Academy, Quantico, VA 22135 or e-mailed to [leb@fbiacademy.edu](mailto:leb@fbiacademy.edu).

**U.S. Department of Justice**  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
*FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*  
935 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20535-0001

Periodicals  
Postage and Fees Paid  
Federal Bureau of Investigation  
ISSN 0014-5688

Official Business  
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## ***Patch Call***



The Talladega, Alabama, Police Department's patch reflects the city's heritage and honors the Creek Indians. Talladega is a Creek Indian word, which translates into English as "border town." Prior to the town's incorporation, it served for hundreds of years as a Creek Indian village.



Santa Fe, New Mexico, is the oldest capital in the United States. On the patch of its police department, the shield depicts the castle from Juan de Onate, Spanish conquistador and explorer; the lion representing Diego de Vargas, who recaptured the city from the Pueblo Indians; and the Mexican Eagle.